

Notes on Mark 12 : 41 – 44 ‘Jesus – the Gift of Giving’

One of the things in ministry I find challenging, fun and unpredictable are what are wonderfully called ‘Occasional services.’ These are services when we celebrate gifts, whether it be in the birth of a child, of a partner to share our lives with, a life that has touched and changed us or the new life we have in Jesus. Or, in other words infant dedications or blessings, weddings, funerals and baptisms. These gifts are gifts whose value is beyond all price and we remember these occasions in very different ways, but what is important is that these times remind and teach us gratitude in all its depths. This September our Sunday teaching is focussing on giving where yes, we’ll be thinking of it as a discipline, as a mark of being part of church but more importantly we’ll be thinking of giving as a lifestyle because giving is always shaped by who? By Jesus who is THE gift of God as a person, in his life, his death, his resurrection and in the gift of the Holy Spirit. Giving is central to our identity as Christians and gift language, instead of provoking guilt or anxiety is actually meant to animate and inspire us as it did Jesus in how he thought of himself as the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Messiah and the Servant.

When we think of giving, you might think that I am going to be speaking about tithing, well I won’t be. This is because tithing is something which belongs to the Law, and though it is something which is good, when we think of giving, our giving is to be guided by a very different set of themes. If you want to summarise the ministry and mission of Jesus as the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Messiah and the Servant what theme would you use? Would you use the image of him as King sitting on a donkey? Would you use a cursed fig tree? What of Jesus cleansing the Temple? How about a parable, like that of the Vineyard owner? Or you could use a debate over the use of a coin or the challenge about the truth of resurrection? Surely wouldn’t the summary of the Law would be a good place to start? Well, Jesus used none of these themes, though we do find them in both Mark 11 and 12. The theme Jesus carefully chose to use was that of an old widow, which is probably the worst theme imaginable because a widow was a nobody, someone who would neither inspire or animate you to live courageously, faithfully and lovingly for God. Yet Jesus thought she was ideal.

This short, punchy story is an incredible summary of Jesus, but also of our lives too. It speaks of Jesus giving his all to God, of his complete and utter faith in God, his dependence on the promises of God when things look bleakest and how to live a hope filled life. But in life and in our estimations, I am sure this woman would be the theme everyone would have overlooked but Jesus always likes to turn things on their heads. For Jesus it is this woman who is to help define us and our lives of following Jesus for it speaks of a life being given to Jesus. When Jesus summoned his disciples to see who he was looking at, he also summons us too, to ask us are you willing to follow me in a way like her?

This is why tithing is no longer an apt way to speak of giving. In our minds we naturally think of 10% but how much is Jesus thinking of? Yes, it is 100%. To be fair, the language of tithing symbolises our giving 100% to God and in Mark 12 verses 29 – 31, when Jesus is summarising the Law, he is speaking there of 100% and the Old Testament is full of stories of people who gladly gave all. But and this is important in

reading our Bibles, we are not Old Testament people, we are New Testament people who are to be inspired and motivated by Jesus who gave his all.

This is why Jesus contrasts the widow with the rich. He contrasts she who gave her all with those who gave some. He is saying to all of us that we are and all that we have belongs to him and is to be used for him. Suddenly this widow instead of being all fluffy, like Miss Marple, makes us all feel profoundly uncomfortable and now we recoil at her actions and Jesus understands this. Like in the parable of the Sower, or in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus recognises the power of mammon to enslave our hearts and minds and souls but there is a way of freedom. This way lies in our learning to nurture and grow a grateful, love filled, faith motivated and hope filled heart, or in other words, to be like this widow.

So, will you dare to be like this widow? Will she become one of your heroes of faith? I think, she was one of Jesus'. Hers was the model which he would fulfil in its uttermost. He was moved by her heart of love for God, and he would do the same. He was stirred by her courage to obey, and he would do the same. He was inspired by her faith in God's promises, and he would do the same. What of us? As followers of Jesus who are called to imitate him, this means we are to do the same too. Yes, I agree with you that it seems mad, that it defies all logic, all common sense but when you think about it what a heart, a mind and a soul set to have though. It is a heart, mind and soul set which Psalm 139 verse 14 speaks of, which Zania spoke about last week. Dare I say it is also something which the stars handed out by the children last week speak of too. Without a doubt, it is something which the bread & wine speak of for sure.

At the end of September, we will be holding a Gift Day it was agreed at the church meeting that it would be for the repair of the rear flat roof at the rear of the church. At the moment the temporary fix is working really well and we are still in the process of gaining grants so we don't know yet how much the difference we will need to make up. Therefore, we are looking to reach a target, dare I ask for £10,000, at this point in time. Gift Days have a long history in the lives of many churches. They are understood as being when a church intentionally and deliberately celebrates the gifts too many to number which we have in Jesus. This is why they were often linked to church anniversaries, when the church would be reminded of all of these things. This is why we're having a Gift Day, to bless this church and to be grateful for all that we receive in and through her and for all that we receive and know in Jesus. Who is our model for this Gift Day? Well, you already know don't you? No, it's not the widow, as awesome as she is, it's who? It's Jesus.